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AUTHOR	Belland, John C.
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ABSTRACT

Presented is a transcript of testimony for the Senate Subcommittee on the Handicapped. Considered is the role of the National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped (NCEMMH) in regard to needs assessment, field testing, and quality control of instructional materials as well as in coordinating the development of a national information and delivery system for instructional materials. Cited is the need of the NCEMMH for long-range dependable federal funding to support its efforts for handicapped children, especially in the area of educational technology. (LH)

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STIMONY FOR THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE HANDICAPPED: 1973

John C. Belland, Ph.D.

The National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped was established June 1, 1972 at The Ohio State University. In this past year we have been involved in a detailed planning effort, the recruitment of staff members, and the beginning of pilot operation. Our budget for the 15-month period from June 1, 1972 through August 31, 1973 is $344,669. Our budget target for the 12-month period from September 1, 1973 through August 31, 1974 is one million dollars. The general philosophy expressed in Ohio State's proposal for The National Media Center and the guiding ideas that we have been following concern the utilization of talent across the country that is best suited to solving problems for handicapped learners. Thus, our initial strategies, which we are presently piloting, are attempts to facilitate the productive output of these creative people.

The first area for which we are trying to provide assistance is the Office of Public Affairs clearance process. This process, established in the Office of Education and in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, is an attempt to eliminate duplication and waste and provide some quality control over non-print materials for instructional use or mass-communications use. We are trying to provide a more sophisticated quality control system and have prepared a way of interfacing with the Office of Public Affairs so that the turn-around time for the clearance in Washington should be reduced from as long as a year, which has occurred in the past, to probably a week.

We are also providing technical assistance to various projects and programs funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. We have begun discussion with two research and development projects funded by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped to help them with media production tasks that they find difficult or impossible in their immediate environment. We are working to develop an efficient, straightforward system for moving products produced under government funding into commercial distribution, working very closely with HEW Publishers Alert, and documenting ways in which materials developers can generate the necessary competitive bidding instruments. The producer's guide is now in the revision process. It should provide the same kind of guidance to producers of instructional packages for the handicapped that a publisher's guide provides authors who intend to submit a text to a commercial publisher. Lastly, we are beginning work on facilitating the processing of data-gathering-forms clearance as required by the Office of Management and Budget, so that data can be gathered effectively as we attempt to assess the instructional materials needs of handicapped learners and field test instructional materials to insure their validity and effectiveness.

Another major function we have undertaken in this developmental year is the assumption of the leadership stance mandated by PL 91-230 and the committee report following that law. We have begun an important project

of determining the educational technology needs of handicapped learners, their teachers, and their parents. We are leading a consortium of Special Education Instructional Materials Centers and Regional Media Centers for the Deaf personnel in designing an overall strategy for materials development and in setting priorities for the development of those materials. This includes setting standards and establishing procedures acceptable for the field testing of products. We are also coordinating and synthesizing the activities leading toward the development of a national information system for instructional materials and a national delivery system for instructional materials. We feel that the synthesis of information and delivery is extremely important in order to conserve the time of the teacher and the handicapped learner. The system that would inform the teacher or the learner about materials appropriate for that learner to achieve certain objectives should also be a system that enables that learner to actually obtain the materials.

As we consider the years ahead, several issues exist that I think are critical ones for the Congress to address. The first is the need for long-range dependable funding for this activity. At present, the Bureau, while it can make tentative commitments for multiple year funding, is forced to require each grant or contract to submit a proposal annually detailing the next year's budget and strategies. This activity probably consumes more time and energy than an appropriate, long-range, ongoing planning effort. This does not imply that these projects and programs should not be accountable; however, requiring periodic progress reports should be sufficient to insure this accountability. Progress reports do indicate changes in strategy and financial allocation.

Severe handicapping conditions cannot be dealt with in short sporadic bursts of energy and activity. It is important that the educational activity of each handicapped person begin at a very early age and continue extensively throughout maturation. Thus, programmatic development must be extensive; it must be integrated; it must be as sophisticated as the state of the art allows. Handicapped learners are handicapped in terms of their relationship to the environment. If the learning environment were structured so that the handicapped learner no longer faced extreme difficulty in learning, but could learn about as naturally as the normal learner, we would have created the ideal environment toward which The National Media Center is working.

Another point of concern is that the total number of handicapped persons in our population is relatively small and so is not particularly attractive to commercial publishers. If developers of materials for specific handicapping conditions were forced to rely entirely on the commercial marketplace for distribution of materials, the design of the materials would be diluted to take in multiple groups of handicapping conditions and perhaps even groups of the economically disadvantaged or generally normal learners. Instructional design technology is not yet sufficiently sophisticated to enable us to make materials so specifically for a given maturation level and handicapping condition that they are unusable by any other. If we were to approach the ideal environment mentioned above, it would seem that we would come increasingly close to this sophistication of design. Without

long-term federal support of this developmental activity, it is highly unlikely that the state of the art of education of the handicapped learner would improve much. Again, part of the reason for activity on the national scale is that only then do we get into the numbers that make this activity cost-effective.

Another concern for the future is that the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped be given program management funds to enable it to continue careful planning of an integrated educational technology program. At present, staff members in the Bureau are preparing regulations and documentation for a carefully integrated network of regional and national centers to provide this necessary coordination and leadership.

In summary, it is important that The National Center on Educational Media and Materials for the Handicapped, the Special Education Instructional Materials Centers, the Regional Media Centers for the Deaf, and the Regional Resource Centers work together to facilitate the development of an appropriately designed instructional program for every handicapped child. Educational technology seems to provide a vehicle for this design effort, yet the level of sophistication that has been achieved in educational technology for general education only scratches the surface of the problems of the precision design required for each handicapped learner. The field is presently using materials designed for the ordinary learner, with some relatively crude adaptations by the teacher. It is also trying to employ materials that have had no systematic field test on the general population, much less on the population of concern. Thus, the state of the art of educational technology needs to be advanced as it makes a concerted effort to deliver appropriate instructional materials for the handicapped learner.

The National Media Center must be a facilitator, coordinator, and broker of talent so that wide-ranging talent can be utilized in solving these problems. The National Media Center does not intend to be an enclave with self-sufficient systems for designing and developing materials; rather, it will integrate the network of centers, the research and development projects, and the fields of educational technology and special education so that the most creative solutions to instructional design problems for the handicapped can be identified, developed, and made accessible to the handicapped learner.